

EXHIBIT ¹

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http://trib.com/news/state-and-regional/advocates-of-mph-speed-limit-say-it-makes-roads-safer/article_973ef28c-313b-5933-b4cc-125983709ba1.html

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(5) Comments

Wyoming Highway Patrol

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Chris Ramirez likes driving fast.

He's traveled in cars approaching 146 mph on race tracks. When he's not burning rubber, he spends his days working on classic and custom vehicles as the owner of Ramirez Rod and Custom in Casper.

He's a fan of a new law that will boost the speed limit from 75 mph to 80 on certain parts of the Wyoming's interstates. And he said new cars are equipped to withstand a potential accident at 80 mph.

"We repair wrecked vehicles on a daily basis," he said. "The safety is there to handle a crash at those speeds."

Lawmakers passed the 80 mph law during the budget session that ended earlier this month. Even though legislators have left the Capitol, debate over the bill continues. The discussion centers around safety and has caused many to question what the future will look like on Wyoming's main thoroughfares. Will there be more accidents? Will the de facto speed limit become 85 mph?

Wyoming Department of Transportation officials are starting work on those answers by conducting speed studies on stretches of interstates 25 and 80 before the law takes effect July 1.

They will study crash rates, highway surroundings and the geometrics of interstates to determine whether the state is creating a safe or perilous situation in certain stretches of roadway, said WYDOT Chief Engineer Del McOmie.

Fifty-mile stretches of the increased speed will be likely in portions of I-80 west of Green River and on I-25 south of Douglas, he said. No two-lane highways will experience a speed increase.

The cost of the study is \$30,000, and the price of replacing signs along the highway is \$80,000.

From what it already knows about increasing speed limits, WYDOT is confident there won't be more accidents.

The state is hoping it can imitate Utah and Texas, two states that recently increased their speed limits to 80 mph, to quell fears that an 80-mph limit will bolster the de facto speed limit to 85 or 90 mph.

Utah hasn't reported an increase in accidents since its new limits went into effect in September. It also didn't report a surge in faster driving. Before the limits changed in Utah, the average driver drove 81 mph. Now the average is 82 mph, said John Gleason, spokesman for the Utah Department of Transportation.

When Utah studied its roadways, it found that an increase to 80 mph propelled drivers to cruise in what's known as the 85th percentile, the average speed that motorists drive on the highway, Gleason said.

"People are driving the speed they are comfortable driving," he said. "And it brings them into compliance with the law."

The 80-mph limit encourages people to travel at the same rate of speed, said John Bowman, spokesman for the National Motorists Association.

"That's what cuts down on accidents," he said. "Believe it or not, it's a safety measure."

Others aren't as confident that it is a fool-proof safety measure.

A 2009 report in the American Journal of Public Health studied traffic fatalities in the U.S. from 1995 to 2005 and found more than 12,500 deaths were attributable to increases in speed limits on all kinds of roads. The study also reported a 9.1 percent jump in fatalities on rural highways where speed limits were increased, but did not cite specific numbers in those instances.

Safety won't take a backseat to increased speed limits in Wyoming, said Col. John Butler, administrator for the Wyoming Highway Patrol.

If an increased limit in Wyoming spurs more accidents or deaths on the highways, the state will go back to 75 mph, Butler said.

"To do this should not be at the expense of human life," he said.